



**Testimony of Jim Fox, Chairperson  
Pennsylvania Parole Board  
February 23, 2026**

Good morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Parole Board's budget request for FY 2026-27.

My name is Jim Fox. I have worked with the Pennsylvania Parole Board since my appointment as Board Member in 2007. Over the years, I have served as a Board Member, Chief Hearing Examiner, and, since June 2023, as Board Chairman.

Before addressing our budget request, I would like to provide an update on the Parole Board's recent activities.

Our goal remains to administer a fair system and to protect the residents of the Commonwealth. We are committed to our mission, utilizing actuarial assessments, structured decision-making, and professional judgment to guide our determinations. Over the last two years, we have successfully implemented Parole Guidelines established by the Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission, which help assess risk and preparedness for release. Since the guidelines became effective, the Board has followed the guideline recommendation in 83% of cases and automation of this process has enabled us to collect meaningful data used to improve our decision making moving forward. Additionally, we have implemented the Commission's parole recommitment ranges to guide decisions regarding parole violators.

Across the Commonwealth, we have conducted numerous "Understanding PA Parole" seminars to educate community stakeholders on the parole process. In partnership with the Department of Corrections and the Office of Victim Advocate, we offer insights into available programs and parole procedures. These symposiums also provide a platform to inform Board decision-makers on key issues, including autism awareness, brain trauma, vicarious trauma, and human trafficking.

In FY 2024-25, the Parole Board interviewed 12,310 incarcerated individuals for parole consideration. During that same period, the Parole Board had a grant rate of 49%. The one-year rearrest rate of individuals during the 2024 calendar year was 20.5%.

The Board is engaged in evaluating individuals for parole release. To determine whether or not to parole someone, decision makers interview incarcerated individuals and review numerous reports and assessments, including actuarial instruments that predict the likelihood of future criminal behavior. Decision makers also consider criminal history, past parole or probation supervision history, psychological reports, prison-life behavior, vocational and educational program involvement, compliance with prescriptive programs that address criminogenic and/or addiction needs, home plans, and reintegration plans. We also consider recommendations from judges, district

attorneys, and the victims themselves. In the last fiscal year, our decision makers participated in 706 in-person victim comments. We have now expanded this program so victims can participate virtually or meet in person with Board Members at four locations across the Commonwealth.

The Parole Board continually strives to improve its work. To become more effective in promoting community safety, we regularly monitor parolee outcomes, board decisions, and the reports and assessments available to us.

The Parole Board continues to embrace the use of technology in all aspects of our decision making and outcome measurement. This continues to lead to efficiencies that both speed up the parole and hearing processes and provide decision makers with more timely access to critical information.

The Board has initiated discussions on leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance data collection for parole interviews. This initiative aims to support informed decision-making by utilizing our extensive case management system, which contains over one million documents. In addition, the Board is exploring AI as a tool to complement professional judgment throughout the parole process. Current efforts focus on practical applications such as organizing and summarizing case materials, assisting with document review, improving scheduling coordination, and identifying routine data points across large volumes of records. The overarching goal is to streamline administrative tasks, reduce processing time, and promote greater consistency—while ensuring that all substantive parole decisions remain the responsibility of trained Board Members and hearing staff. By operationalizing AI in this manner, the Board seeks to better manage caseloads and staffing demands while preserving the integrity of the parole decision-making process.

For the coming year, the Parole Board is requesting funding to support mandated parole processes and cost-to-carry expenses. The requested amount will allow the agency to serve Pennsylvania's parole-eligible population and improve our parole decision process. In the current fiscal year, the budget for the Parole Board is \$13.598 million. This figure includes essential funding for the board, which includes the Hearing Examiners Office and the Records and Administration Office. In FY 2026-27 we are requesting \$14.442 million to continue to fund our essential operations.

Going forward, in addition to advancing the efforts from Act 59 of 2021, the Parole Board looks forward to continuing to implement the common-sense criminal justice reforms outlined in Pennsylvania's Justice Reinvestment Initiatives (JR12). The Parole Board and the DOC will continue to be active participants in the Parole Homicide Review Team, which will report annually on circumstances and efforts to reduce homicides committed by persons on parole.

I am optimistic that the increased opportunities to reduce recidivism by using evidence-based practices to deter and reform criminal behavior will allow us to continue to enhance public safety. I continue to be encouraged by Governor Shapiro's leadership in

this area, and share the Governor's belief that a safer, more united Pennsylvania is a better Pennsylvania.

Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and honorable committee members, thank you for your time and consideration of these additional resources. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.